

and African American communities, including tolerance, equal rights, and justice. As a Jewish American, it is an honor to fight for these values here in Congress today and every day.

RALLYING TO THE FAMILIES OF THE FALLEN AND WOUNDED

(Mr. ROTHFUS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. ROTHFUS. Mr. Speaker, the situation unfolding in Iraq is a tragedy.

Almost 4,500 fellow Americans made the ultimate sacrifice in Iraq defending our freedom and fighting oppression and tyranny. More than 32,000 men and women who served our country in Iraq bear the wounds of war, and all who served had extraordinary pressures put on their families.

Unless you have lived it, one cannot begin to know the pain experienced by the families of the fallen and the wounded. Our men and women in uniform fought for an ideal. That ideal is freedom: the freedom of religion, the freedom of speech, the freedom to assemble and vote and make one's voice heard, freedoms like those we have right here in this Chamber. That ideal will never die.

During these difficult days, Mr. Speaker, let us make sure we are mindful of the sacrifice of so many and let us always rally to the families of the fallen and stand in solidarity with all of our veterans.

VA HEALTH CARE

(Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, the Senate voted last week to pass comprehensive legislation aimed at addressing the long-standing issues within the Department of Veterans Affairs' health care system. Now it is time for the Republican House leadership to bring a comprehensive package to the floor.

With more than 8 million veterans turning to the VA for medical care each year, it is absolutely critical that we thoroughly address these issues in a timely fashion. That is why I commend Congresswoman KIRKPATRICK for introducing companion legislation to the Sanders-McCain bill to improve the quality of care within the VA.

Our veterans should not have to endure excessive long waits, tolerate canceled appointments, and question the quality of care they are receiving, nor should the persons reporting these activities be punished. The legislation would increase access to care while also improving on the quality of care, and it is something that we can act upon today.

Mr. Speaker, our Nation will be judged by how we treat our veterans. I urge this Congress to act swiftly on comprehensive legislation so that we

can bring real accountability—and some sanity—back to the VA.

HONORING KANE COUNTY'S EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR

(Mr. HULTGREN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. HULTGREN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the Kane County Educator of the Year, Carol Mertes of East Aurora School District 131. For Carol, teaching is in her blood. Her grandfather was a principal and her aunt was a teacher in Chicago public schools.

Carol has been an exemplary first grade teacher for decades who has touched many lives through her exceptional teaching skills and care for her students. She has served on the East Aurora District's School Improvement Review Team, Language Arts Curriculum Council, Reading Leaders Committee, and the Reading Task Force.

Teachers like Carol have one of the hardest but most influential jobs in the country. They are in charge of shaping our future generations, and they have the ability to make a huge impact on our youth.

I am grateful for Carol's undying patience and care for our children in Kane County, ensuring that the impact is a positive one.

HONORING JUNETEENTH

(Mr. HIGGINS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. HIGGINS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Juneteenth.

Each June 19th, we celebrate Juneteenth to commemorate the announcement of the end of slavery in the United States. Juneteenth is a celebration of African American freedom, but it is also an opportunity to reflect on opportunities for self-improvement and set goals for the future.

This past weekend, I was honored to take part in the 39th annual Juneteenth Festival in Buffalo. Started in 1976, this festival has grown over the years to become one of the largest of such celebrations in the world and has established its position as an important tradition within the Buffalo community.

Mr. Speaker, I am honored to recognize Juneteenth today to celebrate our Nation's rich African American history and express my thanks to those who organize these important community celebrations of culture and heritage.

IN FAVOR OF A STRONG NATIONAL DEFENSE

(Mr. PALAZZO asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. PALAZZO. Mr. Speaker, events in Iraq over the past week serve as a

chilling reminder of the fact that the world is not getting safer. I am disturbed by these events, but I am not surprised. Over the past few years, my colleagues and I have warned against our Nation's weakening foreign policy and the devastating defense cuts this President insisted on making on the backs of our men and women in uniform. The result is a strained military and a world where our enemies don't fear us and our friends no longer trust us.

On Monday, the USS *Mesa Verde*, one of our Navy and Marine Corps' amphibious warships in the LPD class, entered the Persian Gulf with 550 marines onboard. These ships have a long history of supporting our missions and responding to numerous threats all around the world. This LPD ship sitting in the Persian Gulf full of marines sends a clear message: we will not waiver in defense of American interests or protecting American lives.

I believe we need to keep sending that message. We must adequately fund our Nation's military, and we must provide for more ships like the LPD class amphibious warships so we can ensure the safety and security of our Nation and those who defend it.

□ 1230

NONDISCRIMINATION FOR LGBT FEDERAL CONTRACTORS

(Mrs. DAVIS of California asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mrs. DAVIS of California. Mr. Speaker, with the stroke of a pen, President Obama will extend workplace protections to 14 million LGBT Federal contractors.

Thankfully, LGBT San Diegans are already protected by State law, but this is not the case for all Americans.

I applaud the President for doing the right thing. Now it is time for Congress to end discrimination for all workers.

California and 17 other States have shown that these protections aren't just the right thing to do, they are good policy and good business.

Discrimination has no place in government. Discrimination has no place in the work place.

It is past time for Congress to listen to the American people. The Senate has already passed the Employment Nondiscrimination Act. Let's bring ENDA to the floor and pass it today.

WISHING MARTELL AND RHONDA MENLOVE ALL THE BEST

(Mr. BISHOP of Utah asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. BISHOP of Utah. Mr. Speaker, Utah has some large educational shoes to fill.

Martell Menlove, the State superintendent of public instruction in Utah, is ending a nearly four-decade career in public education. He has